

**DEPARTMENT OF FAIR EMPLOYMENT & HOUSING**

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**RURAL HUMAN SERVICES TO PAY \$152,500 TO SETTLE DFEH
SEXUAL HARASSMENT LAWSUIT**

Nonprofit organization will conduct training and implement complaint processes following accusations against executive director

SACRAMENTO – The California Department of Fair Employment and Housing (DFEH) has obtained a \$152,500 settlement in a sexual harassment case involving a former employee of Rural Human Services, a nonprofit organization located in Crescent City, California, in Del Norte County.

After an unsuccessful attempt to mediate the claim, the DFEH filed suit with the California Superior Court in Sacramento County (Case No. 34-2017-00209832) alleging multiple violations of the Fair Employment and Housing Act (FEHA), which prohibits discrimination and harassment against employees based on their gender, and a violation of the Ralph Civil Rights Act, which prohibits violence or intimidation by threat of violence based on gender. Because the nonprofit organization is a recipient of state funding, the lawsuit also alleged a violation of Government Code section 11135, a law that prohibits discrimination in government-funded programs and activities that the DFEH was charged with enforcing beginning on January 1, 2017.

The civil rights lawsuit was filed against defendants Rural Human Services (RHS) and its executive director, Scott Feller. According to the complaint, Mr. Feller sexually harassed the former program director of Harrington House, a domestic violence shelter within RHS, while she was employed from September 2015 to January 2016. Specifically, DFEH alleged that Mr. Feller subjected the program director to unwanted touching during a business trip, made offensive and grossly inappropriate comments that were sexual in nature, and engaged in unlawful retaliation after she reported the behavior to RHS's human resources personnel and to RHS's Board of Directors.

The DFEH lawsuit further asserted that RHS was aware that Mr. Feller was behaving inappropriately in the workplace prior to the complaint, yet failed to take all reasonable steps to prevent the discrimination and harassment from occurring.

In addition to paying a total sum of \$152,500.00 to settle the lawsuit, RHS and Scott Feller have agreed to cease all unlawful employment practices, disseminate a written policy against sexual harassment and retaliation to all RHS employees, and conduct an anti-discrimination education and training program. The defendants have also agreed to develop and implement a formal complaint process that allows employees to file complaints of unlawful discrimination, harassment and retaliation.

“No one is above the law,” said DFEH Director Kevin Kish. “When harassment comes from the top, everyone in the workplace suffers and DFEH will fight for the right of all Californians to work safely and free from discrimination and harassment. DFEH also takes seriously our new responsibility of ensuring that public funds do not flow to discriminatory programs.”

The DFEH is the state agency charged with enforcing California's civil rights laws. The mission of the DFEH is to protect the people of California from unlawful discrimination in employment, housing and public accommodations and from hate violence and human trafficking. For more information, visit the Department's Web site at www.dfeh.ca.gov.